DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 300 706 CG 021 201

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TITLE The Effects of Divorce on Adolescents: Potential Maladjustment and Therapeutic Implications.
PUB DATE Jun 88
NOTE 47p.; Doctoral Research Paper, Biola University, California.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adjustment (to Environment); *Adolescents; *Age Differences; *Divorce; *Family Problems; *Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

This document presents a literature review concerning the relationship between family divorce and subsequent adolescent psychological maladjustment. This topic is specifically considered in terms of the relationship between parental divorce and adolescent's gender and age at time of divorce. Additionally, empirical studies are reviewed in terms of factors that contribute to and mitigate against pathology. Studies are also considered to determine potential areas for therapeutic intervention. A number of different factors that affect the specific expression of maladjustment are discussed, including the gender of the adolescent, which has been shown to affect the forms of acting out behavior. Other findings are presented which suggest that both boys and girls who experience parental divorce are at risk for academic difficulties, low self-esteem, and general psychological maladjustment; the relationship between the adolescent's age at time of divorce and subsequent pathology was not clear. Conclusions from the analysis are listed, including: (1) adolescents from divorced homes are at increased risk of pathology; (2) specific manifestations of pathology are dependent on a number of factors; (3) effects of a divorce during adolescence extends beyond that period; and (4) from a clinical perspective, adolescents from divorced homes must be evaluated on an individual basis to determine the specific effect that divorce has had on their life. (ABL)

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# THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON ADOLESCENTS: POTENTIAL MALADJUSTMENT AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

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# THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON ADOLESCENTS: POTENTIAL MALADJUSTMENT AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

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A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

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In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Montfort O. Hasz

June 1988

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## ABSTRACT

### THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON ADOLESCENCE: POTENTIAL MALADJUSTMENT AND THERAPEUTIC IMPLICATIONS

Montfort O. Hasz

The relationship between family divorce and subsequent adolescent psychological maladjustment is examined through a review of empirical literature. This is specifically considered in terms of the relationship between parental divorce and the adolescent's gender and age at the time of divorce. In addition, empirical studies are reviewed in terms of factors that contribute to and mitigate against pathology. Studies are also considered to determine potential areas for therapeutic intervention. There are a number of different factors that affect the specific expression of maladjustment. However, adolescents from divorced homes appear to be generally more at risk for maladjustment than adolescents from intact homes.

The Effects of Divorce on Adolescents:
Potential Maladjustment and Therapeutic Implications

The rate of divorce in the United States has risen greatly during the last 70 years, ranging from a low of 1.3 divorces per 1,000 population in 1933, to a high of 5.3 divorces per 1,000 in 1979 (Glick & Lin, 1986). The most dramatic increase of this rate was during the 14 year period between 1965 and 1979, when it rose from 2.5 to 5.3 (Glick & Lin, 1986). Although this trend appears to have declined slightly recently, divorce still has the potential to affect a large portion of the population (Glick & Lin, 1986; Norton & Moorman, 1987). The extent of this potential may be seen in estimates which predict that half of the marriages begun in the 1980's will end in divorce (Lopez, 1987).

The current impact of the divorce rate can be seen in the 1985 census figures which estimate that of the women between 35 and 39 who have ever been married, 32% have been divorced from their first marriage (Norton & Moorman, 1987). In addition, it is projected that an additional 23.5% of these women will divorce during their lifetime (Norton & Moorman, 1987). The actual impact of this high divorce rate extends beyond the immediate individuals and families involved:

> Assessment of the differential impact of divorce on any population has been rendered infinitely more difficult by the profound impact of the divorce phenomenum on patterns of courtship, marriage, and the family in this society as a whole. The high incidence of

> divorce has significantly raised levels of anxiety in relationships between men and women, and in many observed instances, between children and their parents whether or not they themselves come from divorced families (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 445)

Along with raising general anxiety in relationships, the rate of divorce has specifically affected a large number of individuals. Not only does this divorce rate have an effect on marriage partners, but it has also the potential of affecting an enormous number of children.

Glick (1979) reports estimates that 60% of divorcing couples have at least one child under the age of 18. This translates into approximately 1 million children a year who experience divorce, in the United States (Fine, 1987). With the projected continuance of high divorce rates, it is estimated that by 1990, 30% of high school graduates will have spent some time in a family that has experienced divorce (Glick, 1979).

These figures have significance for those within the mental health profession because children from divorced families appear to be at a greater risk for psychological disturbance than children in the general population (Fine, 1987; Kalter, 1977). One of the ways that this has been shown is the over-representation of children from divorced families in psychiatric populations. In a study of outpatient psychiatric records, Kalter (1977) found that

> 32.6% of the children in the sample have experienced a parental divorce,with 18.1% currently in a stepparent home. This is <u>twice</u>

> the rate of occurrence of children of divorce in the general population. (p. 43)

Numerous explanations for this over-representation in psychiatric populations have been given. One explanation is based on the effects of spousal conflict, which can escalate after separation (Fine, 1987). Another explanation focuses on the stress from increased marital and family instability. This can arise as parents divorce, and remarry, forcing children to adjust to step-parents and other new family members (Fine, 1987). This hypothesis is plausible given 1985 Census findings that show 62.2% of divorced women between 20-54 years of age had remarried, 26% of which had already ended in divorce (Norton & Moorman, 1987).

In addition to being over-represented in the psychiatric population, children of divorce have been felt to be at risk for a number of other psychological problems, including behavioral problems, neurotic and psychotic reactions.

> Behavior problems include an abrupt decline in academic performance, aggressive acting out at home and school, drug abuse, truancy, running away, sexual acting-out, and group delinquent behavior. Neurotic conflicts include anxiety reactions, separation fears with school phobia, obsessive-compulsive symptoms with pervasive guilt, depersonalization experiences and psychophysiologic reactions, especially eating disorders. The

stress of divorce can also be instrumental in precipitating a schizophrenic reaction. (Sorosky, 1976, p. 126)

There are other psychological difficulties for which adolescents from divorced homes are potentially vulnerable. These difficulties include severe depression, both at the time of the divorce and long afterwards (Wallerstein, 1984), lowered self concepts (Parish & Taylor, 1979), lowered school performance (Wallerstein, 1985), and sexual acting out (Hetherington, 1972).

The focus of this paper will be on the different psychological disturbances for which adolescents from divorced families appear to be at risk. In considering these disturbances, this paper will focus on research that has been published in the last 10 years, 1977-1987. The studies used in this paper were first researched by means of an extensive manual search of Psychological Abstracts, and then a subsequent computer search of the same time period was performed.

The exception to the 10-year limitation on studies is the inclusion of studies by Wallerstein and Kelly and a study by Hetherington, both of which were originally published in 1972. They were included because of their extensive influence and contribution to this area of research. Wallerstein and Kelly have published a series of longitudinal studies, starting in 1972, that have contributed much to the understanding of the effects of divorce on children and adolescents. Hetherington's 1972 study was examplary in its methodology and is often a standard of comparison for subsequent studies. The importance of Hetherington's

research in this field is supported by the number of references to her work by others. Of the articles used in this review, a total of 18 specifically cited one or more of Hetherington's works, including six references to her original 1972 study.

This paper will consider the psychological disturbances for which adolescents from divorced families are at risk from two different perspectives: by gender and by age at the time of divorce. This method of conceptualizing the effects of divorce on adolescents is consistent with the approaches used by the majority of researchers. First, many researchers feel that male and female adolescents may react differently to their parents' divorce. Second, the relationship between divorce and adolescents' psychological maladjustment may depend on the timing of the divorce. The effects of divorce on those who are adolescents when it occurred will be contrasted with the effects on adolescents who experienced a family divorce earlier in life. Included in this section will be some of the long term effects that appear to correlate with a family divorce occurring in adolescence. After the relationship between divorce and adolescent maladjustment has been considered, there will be a discussion of the therapeutic implications of various studies.

There are a number of difficulties with surveying the literature on this subject. One of the difficulties is the difference of opinion as to the impact of a divorce on the children in the family. While some studies feel that parental divorce is related to the development of pathology in

children, other studies claim that divorce can be positive. This is because divorce is viewed as an opportunity for personal growth and maturity development (Weiss, 1979). Also it is felt that divorce may not necessarily be more negative than the alternatives. This perspective is represented by those who feel that being in a divorced family is preferable to being in a conflict-ridden family (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984).

Another difficulty with surveying this literature is the disagreement over the the cause of the pathology that is seen in children of divorce. Block, Block and Gjerde (1986) argue that the maladjustment experienced by children is not a result of the divorce itself. Rather, the pathology is actually developed before the divorce and is the result of the pre-divorce behavior of the parents. An opposite perspective to this is advanced by Parish and Taylor (1979) who feel that the changes in the family structure due to the divorce contribute significantly to maladjustment:

> individuals who have experienced the divorce of their parents could also frequently endure lowered socioeconomic conditions, the necessity of mothers working outside the home, the need for mothers to function as a solo parent without the support of a spouse in the home, etc. (p. 432)

There are several reasons for the difference of opinion among researchers. This difference may partially depend on the theoretical orientation of the researcher (Blechman, 1982). Also, the researcher's

conceptualization of divorce can influence his or her results. Divorce can be viewed as either a crisis event or a process, the results of which may extend over a period of time (Huntington, !985). Which view a researcher takes has the potential to influence the results that are obtained and their interpretation. Finally, some of the differences in findings may be due to poor research techniques and methodology. This can be corrected by more adequate measures and stronger research methods.

> Future researchers can add clarity to the literature by more stringent attention to validity . . . . using a variety of methods to study the same trait is crucial to the researchers' having confidence that their results are more a function of the trait being measured than the measurement tool itself.
>
> Researchers also can add strength and clarity to the literature in other ways. For example, they need to base sampling, variable selection, and measurement decisions on empirical justifications rather than just convenience (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984, p. 69).

To some extent, all of the above criticisms of studies dealing with adolescent maladjustment and divorce may be true. However, this paper is not primarily an assessment of research techniques in this field. Rather, there appears to be enough evidence to conclude that in some situations a family divorce is correlated with adolescent psychological maladjustment. It is these manifestations of

maladjustment and their therapeutic implications that will be the primary focus of this paper.

## Gender Specific Effects

The association of divorce with psychological maladjustment in adolescents is related to the adolescent's gender, at least in part. There is some pathology that appears to be common to both boys and girls. However, there are other manifestations that are more likely to be seen in one gender or the other. While there is disagreement between various studies as to how divorce affects adolescents, many studies do agree that there are gender-related aspects to these effects. (Hetherington et al., 1985; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Kalter & Rembar, 1981)

Generally it is felt that general adaptation to divorce is different for boys and girls. In summarizing their study, Hetherington et al. felt that "long-term problems in adjusting differ for boys and girls, with boys showing more long-term problems in response to divorce and girls in response to remarriage." (Hetherington et al. , 1985, p. 530)

These differences in adjustment between boys and girls can be seen in several areas. Some gender-related differences in the effects of divorce are evident in aggression, expression of sexuality, academics and general acting out.

Aggression

One of the most noticeable trends among adolescent boys from divorced homes is a manifestation of aggression in relationships. Kalter (1977) found a significantly greater incidence of aggression towards parents in 12- to 17-year-old boys from separated homes than in those from intact homes.

Aggression is not limited to just physical acts, however. In one study, Kalter (1977) defined aggression as either "physical attacks" or "pronounced verbal abuse" (p. 42). Both of these types of aggressive behavior were more common for adolescent boys from divorced families than those from intact families.

The relationship between divorce and aggression in adolescent boys may depend on the age of the adolescent at the time of divorce. Kalter and Rembar (1981) found that adolescent sons were especially aggressive toward both parents and peers, if a parental divorce had occurred when they were between 3 and 5 1/2 years of age. However, this aggression was not found to be a significant problem for boys who were under 2 1/2 or over 6 years old when their parents divorced.

While Kalter, in two different studies, found some interesting and potentially useful correlations between divorce and adolescent aggression, there is a possible difficulty with his 1977 study. While a good differentiation of age and gender variables was made, there was no attempt to test for the possible effects of socioeconomic variables. Yet in the outpatient clinic from which this population was obtained it

was noted that, "fifteen to twenty percent of the families seen are of relatively low socioeconomic status and are receiving public assistance" (Kalter, 1977, p. 41). It is possible that this particular population would experience problems with aggression to a greater degree than the average population. Therefore, it would have been helpful if the study had tested for a possible interaction between socioeconomic status and divorce in their effects on aggression.

Kalter & Rembar (1981) found that for adolescent girls aggressive behavior toward parents and peers was a significant problem. This correlation was specifically for girls who had experienced a parental divorce between the ages of three and five years old. This was similar to an earlier study in which Kalter (1977) found a significantly greater incidence of aggression among adolescent girls from separated homes in comparison to girls from intact homes.

There is some evidence that increased aggression in boys begins before the divorce. In a longitudinal study of children's personality characteristics, Block, Block and Gjerde (1986) assessed boys and girls at ages 3, 4, and 7. The boys who were in a divorced home at age 14 evidenced aggressive personality traits several years prior to the divorce. These adolescents often had been previously assessed as aggressive, impulsive and prone to being physical active. This relationship between aggressive personality characteristics and subsequent incidence of family divorce was significant for boys, but not

for girls. Block et al. hypothesized that these personality traits were a reaction to marital tension that already existed in the homes.

Sexually Related Difficulties

Numerous studies have indicated that adolescent girls from divorced families are much more likely, than adolescent boys from similar situations, to exhibit problems related to sexual acting out and relationships with the opposite sex (Hetherington, 1972; Hetherington et al., 1985; Kalter, 1977; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Kalter et al., 1985; Wallerstein, 1985).

In comparing outpatient psychiatric records, Kalter (1977) found that difficulties with sexual behavior was a significant problem for adolescent girls. However, this was not found to be a significant problem for adolescent boys. Consistent with this, Kalter and Rembar (1981) found that 32% of the adolescent girls from divorced families had experienced problems with sexual behavior. This was in contrast to only 16% of adolescent boys from divorced families who had similar behavioral problems.

In her pioneer work in this area, Hetherington (1972) studied the behavior of adolescent girls at a community center. In this study she compared girls who came from divorced homes and lived with their mothers with girls from intact homes and with girls whose fathers had died. She found that the girls from divorced homes were more likely to actively seek attention from male peers and older men than were girls from intact and widowed homes. This was evidenced by

nonverbal actions of the girls in relation to males, the amount of time that they attempted to be within physical proximity of males, and the girls' own verbal reports.

This same type of dynamic was noted by Wallerstein (1985), who found in her study that 33% of the daughters of divorce tended to drift in and out of relationships and were often involved with men much older than themselves.

In this whole area of sexually related difficulties experienced by adolescents, further studies need to be done. There are a few studies that have compared boys and girls on this measure (Kalter, 1977; Kalter & Rembar, 1981). However, more research needs to be done to determine if this is a problem for all adolescents or is more of a problem just experienced by girls.

Academic Problems

One area where there appears to some disagreement concerning the gender-related effects of divorce is in regards to academic difficulties. Some studies have found more academic problems in boys to be associated with family divorce (Block et al., 1986; Wallerstein, 1985). However, there are other studies that have concluded that adolescents in general from divorced homes are more likely to experience academic difficulties(Rosenthal & Hansen, 1980).

The effects of divorce on academic problems may depend on the age of the child when the divorce occurred. Kalter and Rembar (1981) considered adolescent maladjustment in relationship to gender and

whether the parental divorce had occurred when the child was younger than 2 1/2, between 3 and 5 1/2, or older than 6 years old. For adolescent boys, when the parental divorce occurred when they were under 2 1/2 years old, they were more likely to experience academic difficulties than if the divorce had occurred at another age. However, for adolescent girls academic problems were more likely to be present if the divorce occurred when they were between 3 and 5 1/2 or over 6 years old (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). Not many studies have looked at how divorce interacts with gender and age at the time of divorce in affecting adolescent academic problems. However, this interaction may help explain the varying opinions as to the relationship between parental divorce and academic problems.

General Acting Out

General acting out is a potential problem for both adolescent boys and girls (Kalter, 1977; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Kalter, Reimer, Brickman, & Chen, 1985). In this section acting out refers to various oppositional behaviors including some illegal actions. While aggression and sexual acting out could be included here, they have been considered earlier. The specific form that this acting out takes appears to be gender related. However, the extent of these gender differences in the association of divorce with specific types of acting out is difficult to determine. This is because some of the studies that have found these problems have not analyzed them separately by gender as fully as they could have.

For adolescent boys, conflicts with the law were found to be a form of acting out that was related to divorce. Kalter (1977) found a significantly greater incidence of conflict with the law, which was defined as arrest or warning of arrest for boys from separated or divorced homes than boys from intact homes. In contrast, there was no relationship between incidence of conflict with the law and divorce for adolescent girls.

For adolescent girls, acting out appears to take a different form. Kalter et al. (1985) found that girls from divorced homes were more likely to have problems with illicit drug use, running away, truancy, and theft than were their counterparts from intact homes. These effects remained even after statistically controlling for socioeconomic status. Acting out in this manner does not necessarily indicate legal problems, however. In their study, Kalter et al. (1985) noted that "Despite the considerable incidence of 'delinquent behaviors,' the girls in this group do not represent a population of delinquents; over 90% of them had never had contact with the police" (p. 541)

Overall, various studies have indicated that the specific type of psychological maladjustment associated with divorce depends upon the adolescent's gender. In some instances, such as with aggression, there appears to be a difference between the effects of divorce on boys and girls. In other areas, such as academic difficulties there is a possibility that the effect depends upon a combination of gender and age at the time of the divorce.

In regards to acting out, studies have indicated that divorce appears to increase the likelihood of conflict with the law for boys. However, divorce does not appear to have the same effect on girls. While it is associated with increased acting out, girls do not appear to get into legal difficulties. Rather, studies have indicated that girls from divorced homes are at risk to act out sexually. However, caution needs to be exercised in regards to this whole area of acting out. There is a tendency among studies to consider the association of divorce with acting out for one gender and not test for this same association in the other gender.

There is also a possibility that the specific expression of psychological difficulty associated with divorce may depend upon gender and the child's age at the time of the divorce. This relationship is one that needs to be considered in future research.

## Age-Related Effects

The previous section discussed how the effect of divorce on adolescent psychological maladjustment may differ for girls versus boys. Such effects of divorce may also vary according to the age of the child when the divorce occurred. This may account, at least in part, for the wide range of psychological difficulties for which adolescents from divorced homes appear to be at risk. Studies appear to find different psychological problems for those adolescents whose family divorce

occurs earlier in life versus those whose family divorce occurs during adolescence. In addition, the specifics effects of divorce may not be limited to adolescence, but may be evident at a later age.

In considering the relationship between age at the time of divorce and effects of the divorce the material will be organized differently than it was in the previous section. In the gender-related section each specific effect of divorce was considered individually. In this section the different effects will be discussed throughout as they relate to the various ages. This method of considering the various effects of divorce is being employed to keep the emphasis on the age factor.

In regards to the relationship between age at the time of divorce and specific pathology, the findings of the different studies must be interpreted with some caution. This is due to the methodology employed in most of the studies. The majority of the studies considered either adolescents who have experienced an earlier family divorce or those who have experienced a divorce while they were adolescents. However, these two groups have not often been contrasted in the same study. It is possible that some of the specific manifestations of pathology that have been found apply to adolescents in general rather than just those whose parents divorced at a particular age. More research is needed that systematically compares adolescents who experienced their parents' divorce at different ages.

Effects of Early Divorce

Adolescents who have experienced a family divorce earlier in life appear to be at risk for a number of psychological difficulties. One of the most common is low self esteem. In addition, adolescents from early divorcing homes also have been found to exhibit selective repression, difficulties in relations with their parents, and a preoccupation with the family divorce.

Low self esteem appears to be one of the more commonly studied difficulties of adolescents from divorced homes (Parish & Dostal, 1980; Parish & Taylor, 1979; Raschke & Raschke, 1979). Low self esteem was found to be a definite problem in a comparison of junior high school students from divorced versus intact homes (Parish & Taylor, 1979). In this study the adolescents from the divorced homes scored significantly lower on a test in which students were ask to identify personal characteristics of themselves. This test asked the adolescents to identify positive and negative adjectives which they felt accurately described themselves. The adolescents from the divorced homes chose negative adjectives to describe themselves more often than did the adolescents from intact homes.

In another study Parish and Dostal (1980) obtained similar findings. In this study the adolescents who were from divorced homes were more negative in their evaluations of themselves than were the adolescents who were from intact homes. Also, it was found that this evaluation was carried over to the adolescents' view of their parents.

Those from divorced homes were more inclined to rate their parents negatively than those from intact homes.

Another effect of divorce that may be tied into a low self-concept was noted by Rosenthal and Hansen (1980). In their study adolescents from divorced families were found to have much lower vocational aspirations than did those from intact homes.

An opposite opinion was expressed by Raschke & Raschke (1979), who felt that being in a divorced home was not necessarily associated with a poor self-concept. Rather, they found that low self-concepts were correlated with level of family conflict rather than family structure (divorced versus intact). One limitation of this study was the lower socioeconomic status of the sample. This factor raises questions as to the generalizability of these findings to other socio-economic statuses.

Another effect of divorce that has been noted among some adolescents is a very selective repression. Wallerstein (1984) observed this phenomenon in some who were of preschool age at the time of divorce. In personal interviews, many of these adolescents were not able to remember details surrounding the divorce, even though some of them had witnessed intense family conflicts. Yet, these same adolescents were able to recall clearly other events that occurred at approximately the same time. There is some evidence that those who could not remember the details of the divorce were aware of the

advantages of this. Several of the adolescents stated in interviews, "I'm so glad I was so young that I don't have to remember" (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 450).

For any adolescent, being in a divorced family has the potential of affecting relationships negatively. One of the most obvious relationships to be affected is the adolescent's relationship with his or her parents. This appears to be particularly true for those adolescents who have experienced a family divorce earlier in their life. Wallerstein (1984) found that even those who had not seen their fathers for a number of years felt a strong need for their fathers during adolescence. For some adolescents this need appears to influence their perception of their father and allow them "without contradiction, to maintain a benign image of the loving father, side by side with a history of repeated rejections and failure" (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 448).

One problem with a family divorce is that it can become a preoccupation for an adolescent. This can occur even though the family divorce may have taken place when a child was fairly young. This was evident in one study in which 30% of the subjects felt that the divorce still affected them even though it had occurred ten years earlier. In this group, "the divorce had remained a central aspect of their lives and evoked strong feelings, tears, and profound sadness as they spoke of their loneliness and continued sense of deprivation within the divorced or remarried family" (Wallerstein, 1984, p. 451).

Effects Among those Who are Adolescents When Divorce Occurs

Among those who were adolescents at the time of divorce there are several manifestations of maladjustment. Some of these appear to be unique to this age group, while others are similar to the maladjustment experienced by adolescents whose parents divorced earlier. Generally, those who are adolescents when their families divorce are at risk for a severe initial response to the divorce, low self esteem, potential relationship disruption, and an interference with normal adolescent psychological development.

Many adolescents in Wallerstein's study had extremely negative initial responses to the divorce, although most were temporary manifestations. Some adolescents responded to the divorce with acute depression and severe acting out (Wallerstein, 1985). For others the response involved "a vulnerability . . . to a regression that included emotional and social withdrawal from involvement with friends and investment in school" (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 546). It was also noted that the majority of the adolescents in this study were very anxious about their own future.

The effects of divorce on adolescents' self-esteem appear to be similar, regardless of when the divorce occurred. In a comparison of adolescents from recently divorced homes with adolescents form intact homes, Long, Forehand, Fauber and Brody (1987) found that self-concept related to family structure. On measures of self-perceived cognitive and social competence, adolescents from divorced homes

rated themselves significantly lower than did adolescents from intact homes.

Another manifestation of pathology for those who have experienced divorce during their adolescence has been termed a "neurosis of abandonment" (Sorosky, 1977). With this neurosis new relationships are entered into tentatively with a fear of eventual rejection and abandonment. This fear is not only part of adolescence but can extend into adult life and influence relationships negatively.

Divorce may also be disruptive to the process of adolescent development. This may be especially true for those who are younger adolescents at the time of divorce, since they are vulnerable to experiencing specific difficulties with the entrance into adolescence (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974). This disruption can take the form of

> a) a temporary interference with entry into adolescence with regressive, dependent behavior; b) a prolonged interference with entry into adolescence with evidence of serious developmental disturbance and c) pseudo-adolescence with accelerated sexual and aggressive acting out. (Sorosky, 1977, p. 125)

Long Term Problems

The difficulties that are experienced by those in divorced homes do not necessarily end when the adolescent leaves home or is no longer an adolescent. Many of those who were adolescents when their parents divorced have carried the effects of it into later life. This may reflect

the interference of divorce with the negotiation of the adolescent tasks and the ability to make a transition into the next stage of life.

One effect of divorce that appears to carry over from adolescence is low self-esteem. This was found by Young and Parish (1977) in a study of female college students. In this study girls who were not living with their fathers because of divorce were compared with girls whose fathers had died and girls from intact homes. Those who had lost their fathers, no matter what the reason, rated themselves significantly lower on a checklist of descriptive adjuctives and on Maslow's Security-Insecurity Inventory than did those whose fathers were still living.

The potential exists for divorce to have a lifelong effect on some adolescents. Another reason that divorce has the potential of long term effects is that a family divorce appears to have an effect on college attendance. In one study Wallerstein (1985) found that only approximately 66% of adolescents from divorced homes had attended, or were currently attending college. Yet, this study took place in an area where 85% of the general population went to college. Financial difficulties may have contributed to this low college attendance, as there were some in the study who did not receive any monetary help with college from non-custodial parents. Yet there were some non-custodial parent who were earning over $100,000 a year.

In a preliminary study of the effects of divorce during adolescence on those in young adulthood, Cooney, Smyer, Hagestad and Klock

(1986) highlighted some general themes that appeared. Participants in this study were middle to upper-middle-class college students between the ages of 18 to 23 who had experienced the divorce of their parents within three years prior to the study. In this study they were asked to respond to an inventory of life satisfaction and checklists of coping strategies. There are many difficulties with this study including a lack of control groups, minimal statistical analysis and poor experimental design. However, this study does highlight some possible trends that appear to be consistent with psychological difficulties experienced by younger adolescents in other studies (Farber et al., 1985; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985). Problems noted by Cooney et al. (1986) included general emotional upset, anger, stress concerning loyalty conflicts and concerns about their parents' future. These difficulties are similar to those that are experienced by younger adolescents. It is possible that the effects of divorce experienced during adolescence extends into young adulthood.

In her ten-year follow-up of those who had been older children and adolescents at the time of the divorce, Wallerstein (1985) found some of the negative aspects of divorce continuing into adulthood. One of the most surprising was the employment history of those involved in the study. Of a sample of 40 men and women who had experienced parental divorce 10 years earlier, approximately half were still in school. Of the balance, who were working instead of attending school, not many appeared to be successful.

Of the young people entirely out of school, almost a third (30%)

were unemployed, of whom only a very few had marketable skills. The remainder had a history of low-level jobs and frequent change in employment. Of the 14 young people who had left school and were fully in the employment market, only 4 held professional or career-oriented jobs. The troublesome finding is that of the 14 who had opted for employment and had left school, most were employed in itinerate, relatively unskilled jobs, such as waitressing or temporary sales.. . .except for a minority of these young people, those who had entered the employment market were poorly equipped to enter that market and were doing so at the lower levels. (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 548).

This is remarkable in that the adolescents in this study had come from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds, and many were from families in which the parents held advanced degrees in law, medicine or business. On the basis of family socioeconomic status, it would be expected that those in the study would be more career oriented.

As can be expected one of the longer term results of divorce is the effect that it can have on an individual's perspective on marriage. In interviews, Wallerstein (1985) found that the majority of those who had experienced divorce while still adolescents were in favor of a lasting marriage. However, there appeared to be a good deal of caution.

Two-thirds of the group expressed conscious fear of marriage despite their wish to marry. A smaller number (26%) were intensely fearful of repeating their parents' mistakes in a

relationship of their own, and another 40% of the group were at least moderately worried. (Wallerstein, 1985, p. 551)

One interesting subgroup of this study was a third of the young women, who appeared to be drifting in and out of various romantic relationships, but had not evidenced any stability. In this group several had relationships with men who were much older than themselves. Yet these relationships most often were financially unstable and required the women to be working.

Examining the effects of divorce on adolescents from an age-related perspective highlights some different aspects of maladjustment than examining them from a gender-related perspective. However, conclusions must be drawn carefully from the studies that have considered the age-specific effects of divorce on adolescents, as this approach has the potential to be misleading. By considering only one age group, a study may attribute an effect to that specific age, when in actuality it may cut across several different ages. This can be seen in the adolescent's self-esteem. This was found to be a problem for those who had experienced an early divorce and for those who were adolescents at the time of the divorce. In addition, low self-esteem was a problem that continued past adolescence for some from divorced families. It appears that low self-esteem is a problem that may exist for all adolescents from divorced homes, regardless of the recency of the divorce.

It is possible that there are other general effects of divorce that cut across different age groups. However, this is not clear from the studies that have been done. It might be helpful for future research in this area to specifically compare the effects of divorce by the recency of the divorce. At this point, some of the different forms of maladjustment that adolescents from divorced homes experience have been found only for recent divorces or only for early divorces. However, since most studies only consider one of those categories, it is difficult to determine whether such effects depend on the age at the time of divorce or whether they are common to most adolescents from divorced homes.

## Implications for Therapy

It appears that there are a variety of types of psychological maladjustment for which adolescents from divorced homes may be at risk. In part this is dependent on the gender of the adolescent and his or her age at the time of the divorce. Because of the variety of pathologies and the uncertainty as to how much at risk they are, there is no single therapeutic model for treating adolescents who have been affected by divorce. However, the studies that have been done in this area have some specific implications for the therapeutic process. These implications can be considered in regards to contributing factors to pathology, mitigating factors for pathology and possible therapeutic

interventions. In considering each of these areas, it is necessary to look at the specific conclusions and general applications of different studies. Also, these studies can be useful therapeutically for adolescents from divorced homes.

Contributing Factors for Pathology

A major point of disagreement in studies on divorce concerns the causative factor for pathology. Some studies have argued that it is not the divorce itself, but other influences that may generally accompany the divorce. Farber et al. (1985) felt that many different factors may affect the manner in which an adolescent responds to a parental divorce:

> adaptation to a marital dissolution involves a transitional process which may extend over a prolonged period of time and which may engender further stressors. This model emphasizes that in order to understand an individual's response to marital dissolution it is also important to understand the psychological and situational mediating factors . . . that define the context surrounding his/her efforts to adapt to the new life circumstances subsequent to the stressful event per se. (Farber et al., 1985, p. 172)

Some researchers have felt that family conflict is an important influence, if not a primary cause, of pathology (Kurdek et al., 1981; Long, 1985; Petersen & Zill, 1986; Raschke & Raschke, 1979). Both Peterson and Zill (1986) and Long (1985) found family conflict to correlate with low self esteem in adolescents. This was true

whether the adolescents came from divorced or intact homes. For Raschke & Raschke (1979) it was conflict, not divorce, that was significantly associated with behavior problems.

Farber et al. (1985) expanded on the role of family conflict in the etiology of pathology. In their study on emotional maladjustment among adolescents in divorced families, they found the type of family interactions to be the significant factor.

> Heightened levels of stress from "hassles" of dealing with family conflict or disorganization were found to be associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and hostility. Similarly, subjects who rated their family environments as being characterized by lower levels of cohesion or more conflict-filled had higher levels of anxiety and those who viewed their families as more controlling also reported greater feelings of anger and hostility. (Farber et al., 1985, p. 181)

These patterns are not unusual among families that subsequently divorce. Thus, it may be the pre-divorce family's pattern of interaction and conflict that plays a part in the development of pathology among adolescents from divorced homes.

Long et al. (1987) investigated how parental conflict was related to adolescents' perception of their own level of cognitive and social competence and also to the adolescents' level of competence as assessed by teachers. Parental conflict, but not recent divorce, was negatively correlated with the teachers' assessment of adolescents' competence.

However, the adolescents' self-perceived level of confidence was correlated with family structure (intact versus divorced). The implication of this study is that parental conflict is a variable that needs to be controlled for in isolating the effects of the divorce itself.

The level of family conflict may be an important element contributing to adolescent pathology in both intact and divorced homes. However, it should be noted that there is often family conflict prior to and surrounding a divorce. In some situations, conflict between spouses is not lessened by a divorce, but continues on (Long, 1985).

Conflict is not the only factor contributing to adolescent maladjustment. Family socioeconomic status also appears to be correlated to pathology among divorced families (Blechman, 1982; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1985: Wallerstein, 1985). Socioeconomic status can be a particularly important factor because often it changes after divorce.

A final factor that may contribute to the expression of pathology involves a complex relationship between the adolescent's gender, age at the time of divorce, and current age (Kalter & Rembar, 1981). In the review of the records of 144 children of divorce, they felt that adolescent girls who had experienced a parental divorce when they were between three and five years old were likely to have academic problems and exhibit aggression toward peers and parents. However, parental divorce when the girls were under three years old or over five

years old was not significantly correlated with any specific maladjustments. For adolescent boys a parental divorce before the age of 2 1/2 was correlated with nonaggressive disturbances in peer relationships. However, a family divorce from 3 to 5 1/2 years of age was correlated with aggression difficulties in boys.

While this study may be rather complicated, it does points out the need to consider the possible interaction of gender and age at the time of divorce with the effects of the divorce itself. This study also points out that an adolescent's reaction to parental divorce may be a combination of a number of different factors.

Thus, there are three specific ways in which studies on the relationship between divorce and adolescent maladjustment have highlighted factors that contribute to pathology in these situations. These factors are relevant to the therapeutic process, as they highlight areas that should be considered in working with adolescents from divorced homes. The studies on divorce are relevant in another way also. Not only do these studies help in the understanding of factors that contribute to pathology, but they also point out factors that mitigate the expression and/or severity of maladjustment.

Factors Mitigating Against Pathology

Factors that have the potential for lessening the severity or expression of adolescent pathology in response to parental divorce are important therapeutically. The presence or absence of these factors can aide the clinician in assessing the severity of pathology in a specific

case. These factors can also provide tools for the clinician in working with adolescents from divorced homes. In considering the studies, there appear to be three specific factors that can help mitigate the severity of adolescent pathology. These are the relationship between the adolescent and the divorced parents, the network of social support available to the adolescent and the time since the divorce.

Several studies have emphasized the parent-adolescent relationship after the divorce and its effect on pathology (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1985; Kalter et al., 1985; Petersen & Zill, 1986). One aspect of this that can potentially lessen the severity of maladjustment is the sex of the custodial parent. Living with the opposite sex parent has been correlated with adolescent pathology (Petersen & Zill, 1986). This appears to be especially true for boys. For girls, pathology may be affected by their relationship with their father even if he is not living in the home (Hetherington et al., 1985). Girls who maintain a good relationship with their fathers appear to have an easier time adjusting and have less severe expressions of pathology (Petersen & Zill, 1986).

Another aspect to consider is the marital status of the custodial parent. It is possible that remarriage in some instances may serve to lessen adolescent maladjustment. In their study of the relationship between home structure and self esteem, Parish and Young (1979) found that adolescents from reconstituted homes were closer in their self evaluation to adolescents from intact homes than were adolescents from single-parent homes. The one exception to this is adolescent

girls. Both Peterson & Zill (1986) and Hetherington et al. (1985) found remarriage of a custodial mother to be potentially disruptive for adolescent girls.

In addition to the relationship between the adolescent and parents, it appears the the network of social support available to the adolescent can lessen maladjustment. However, the important factor it is not so much the amount of support that is available but the quality of it. This was one of the key findings of Farber et al. (1985) in their study on the mediating factors affecting adolescent adaptation to divorce.

> In their efforts to deal with parental divorce those adolescents who sought out family members more frequently for support in dealing with this transition were found to be more anxious than those who did not. However, those adolescents who perceived their families as being most helpful, regardless of the frequency with which they sought their help, were less anxious. Thus the "quality" of the social support family members offered may be more important than the "quantity" of support received in determining adaptation to this life transition. (pp. 182-183)

Another potential factor in lessening the effect of divorce on adolescent pathology may be the time since the divorce (Farber et al., 1985; Kurdek et al., 1981). In a two-year follow-up to an earlier study, Kurdek et al. (1981) found that the feelings of the adolescents were more positive than they had been in the original study. This is similar to the findings of Farber et al. (1985), who reported significantly lower

levels of anxiety for adolescents who had a greater amount of time since the parental divorce than for those with a more recent divorce.

However, the exact effect of time on adolescent adjustment to divorce is not totally clear. This is because of the studies which have found a possible relationship between early parental divorce and later adolescent pathology (Kalter, 1977: Kalter & Rembar, 1981). It may be that when reaction to the divorce is less severe, time helps the adolescent to adjust.

In summary, factors that mitigate the negative effects of divorce on adolescent pathology are the relationship between the adolescent and his or her parents, the network of social support available to the adolescent and possibly the length of time since the divorce. Another therapeutic implication of divorce studies and adolescent is to pinpoint specific issues that may require intervention.

In addition to identifying factors that can mitigate or contribute to adolescent pathology, studies that deal with the effects of divorce on adolescents are therapeutically relevant in another way. These studies are useful in identifying specific issues that may require therapeutic intervention.

Areas of Therapeutic Intervention

One of the values of the studies that have been done on divorce and psychological maladjustment in adolescents is that they have often pointed out the specific areas that deserve clinical attention. In assessing the methodologies of these studies, Kanoy and Cunningham

(1984) have highlighted five categories of variables around which most studies tend to cluster:

> These five categories include behavior of children, personality characteristics and patterns of children, children's recollection of divorce and response to it, parent-child interaction and attitudes toward parents, and moderating influences (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984, p. 65).

These categories are helpful for the clinician because they provide information as to what areas of the adolescent's experience need to be considered in therapy.

A specific area that may be in need of therapeutic intervention is the relationship between the adolescent and his or her parents. Parish and Dostal (1980) found that adolescents from divorced homes had a significantly lower evaluation of their parents than did adolescents from intact homes. However, since a good relationship with one or both parents is associated with better adjustment, this relationship is one that should be given attention.

In considering the adolescent's relationship to parents another area that may have to be dealt with is the adolescent's reaction to the loss of the parent. Some adolescents appear to react with an extreme amount of anger toward the parent who initiated the divorce, while others carry around unrealistic fantasies of parental reconciliation (Wallerstein, 1984). Both of these issues must be dealt with for an adolescent to have a healthy relationship with parents.

Divorce also appears to influence the emotional development of adolescents. Specifically, therapeutic intervention may be needed in helping the adolescent to adjust to an appropriate level of maturity. As the result of clinical interviews with single parents and adolescents from divorced homes, Weiss (1979) felt that a divorced home could foster an early maturity for many. While early maturity is not necessarily pathological, an adolescent may need help adjusting in this area. Also, other adolescents may need help in adjusting if there is a regression or fixation at an earlier level of maturity (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974).

## General Conclusions

Generally it appears that the effect of divorce on adolescents' adjustment depends on the gender of the adolescent. The effect on aggression and various forms of acting out differ by gender. There also appears to be some relationship between gender and sexually related difficulties. However this specific problem needs futher investigation to determine whether it is actually gender-related or is common to both boys and girls from divorced homes.

Studies dealing with the effects of divorce on adolescents have also highlighted some pathologies that appear to be consistent across gender. Both boys and girls from divorced homes apear to be at risk to

experience academicaly related difficulties, low self-esteem and general psycholiogical maladjustment.

The relationship between the adolescents' age at the time of divorce and subsequent pathology is not clear. The adolescent's age at the time of divorce may contribute to the manner in which relationships are affected or influence subsequent psychological development. In addition, future goals or post-adolescence adaptation may be affected by age factors. However, it is also possible that these maladjustments are experienced by most adolescents who come from divorced homes.

The studies on divorce and adolescent maladjustment have a number of therapeutic implications. Studies have highlighted factors that both contribute to and mitigate against pathology. In addition, these studies have identified areas in adolescent adjustment that may need therapeutic intervention.

Specifically there are four conclusion that can be drawn from these studies. First, it appears that adolescents from divorced homes are at risk for developing pathology. It is granted that in some situations adolescents are better off in divorced home than a conflict-ridden family. In addition, it is also possible for some adolescents to mature faster when living in a divorced home. However, living in a divorced home is most typically associated with the development of adolescent pathology.

Second, it can be concluded that specific manifestation of pathology is dependent on a number of factors. Therefore, not all adolescents will

react in the same manner to a parental divorce. The specific reaction depends, among other things, upon the adolescent's personality, the level of family conflict, support relationships that are available, the current marital status of the custodial parent, and the relationship with the non-custodial parent.

Third, the effects of a divorce, that occurs during adolescence extends beyond that time period. A parental divorce can continue to influence an individual during young adulthood. The effects of divorce may also be felt indirectly, as education, perspectives on marriage and future goals are influenced.

Fourth, from a clinical perspective, adolescents from divorced homes must be evaluated on an individual basis to determine the specific effect that divorce has had on their life. There is no general scenerio for those who come from divorced homes. These adolescents tend to be at risk. However, the specific kind of risk is an individual matter.

While studies indicate that a family divorce can profoundly influence adolescents, more research is still needed. We need to know more about how the effects of divorce vary for children of different ages and genders. Current studies have not explored this relationship fully enough. There espically needs to be a delineation between what maladjustment is a result of the adolescent's age at the time of divorce, and what maladjustment is common for all adolescents from divorced homes.

With the potential that there is for psychological maladjustment, clinicians and researchers need to be concerned about adolescents from divorced homes. This is a high risk group, and while much has been done in the past in terms of research and intervention, much more remains to be done.

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